

Description

The anonymity of the [peer review](#) process has always been regarded as a key tenet of the quality and integrity of academic publishing. The freedom to comment openly and without fear of retribution, it is argued, frees reviewers from the potential bias of peer pressure. It also limits the extent to which ego can directly impact the feedback being given.

The review, after all, should be about the research, not the reviewer, and a [review environment](#) in which participants can converse with candor benefits everyone.

Piercing the Veil—Arguments in favor

In reality, the blessing of candor is distinctly one-sided. The reviewers may operate without fear of retribution, but the researchers are left at the mercy of whatever detailed feedback those reviewers decide to provide.

Rejections based on failure to follow [journal submission](#) requirements or obvious data errors may be easy to swallow. But what if you suspect that a [rejection](#) is based on a misunderstanding of the content or that the reviewers are inadvertently displaying a bias towards the topic? Your options are then limited to a predictably unsuccessful appeal.

Knowing who is reviewing your work brings all of those issues out into the open, and advocates argue, would force all parties to raise their game. Transparency would force reviewers to take extra care in ensuring that their feedback could not be misconstrued as biased.

Also, when the identities are out in open, reviewers are forced to deliver more detailed feedback. Because the researchers look to continue the dialog, and reviewers will have to anyway clarify in follow-up conversations.

A Case of “When” Not “If”

As research journals struggle with [rising incidents of retraction](#) and cases of fraudulent peer review practices, the pressure to draw back the curtain continues to increase.

We may, of course, learn the identity of reviewers who are caught in [peer review circles](#), where researchers collude to review each other's work, but when a journal is forced to retract an article, the names of the peer reviewers are not revealed, even if the retraction casts doubt on the quality of their work.

Deflecting attention towards the alleged lower quality of peer reviews in open-access journals should not absolve the most prestigious journals of their transgressions. If we subscribe to the tenet that great power brings great responsibility, then surely that power is best tempered by transparency?

Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater!

So should peer review be transparent? Those in favor argue that the process is irrevocably broken and that the trust of every academic journal's readership has been lost to a rising tide of scandal. As such, they advocate for complete [open access](#), leaving the published work to the feedback of the readers.

However, in all the excitement, there is a note of caution! We should not just throw the baby out with the bathwater. Let us consider an intermediate solution to begin with.

Doing away with the anonymity of the peer review process would cast a bright spotlight on the expertise of the peers being granted the power to launch or [tarnish academic careers](#) with acceptance or rejection for publication in a respected journal. Working in that spotlight should help to re-establish the lost integrity of the process.

But then, I doubt if this revised job description for peer reviewer would be as attractive without compensation! Quality, after all, comes at a price.

Do you think that peer can continue to maintain quality while still being transparent? Let us know your thoughts in the comments below!

Category

1. Publishing Research
2. Understanding Reviews

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